

Audience of the “Communities That Work” program

Communities That Work is designed for both Community Leaders and Community Change Agents. That is, people who thoughtfully work in large complex social systems known as neighborhoods and communities. The program includes theoretical information and practical tools that both novices and experienced practitioners can use to understand positive change and to initiate a positive change project in a community.

The program also provides a complete explanation of the theories from which Appreciative Inquiry and Asset Based Community Development comes and the principles on which they are based, a set of tools that focuses on the application of positive change theories to communities, and detailed plans for the implementation of the program in small, medium, and large neighborhoods and communities.



*Ohio State University Extension
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Communities That Work Program



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The Context

Today and for the foreseeable future communities will face the explosion of the global market place, the continued expansion of cities and metropolitan areas, environmental challenges, increasing diversity, and the continued application of advanced technology to life. These forces are requiring communities to reassess basic ways of operating and therefore are fundamentally shifting the context of community development work. Seeking greater social, physical and economic vitality, many communities are searching for appropriate strategic methods and tools to collectively renew their sense of purpose, re-examine core values and develop a compelling vision of the community. Community leaders are eager for fresh ideas about the kinds of leadership that can transcend differences, renew hopes, raise thinking to new levels and energize citizens for collaborative action. Moreover, communities are seeking ways to build partnerships and alliances to address concerns, which cannot be solved by unilateral action. All these factors portray a compelling opportunity for a thoughtful, responsively designed program for strengthening the organizing capacities of communities to best meet the demands of a changing world.

Program Overview

Communities That Work is a new form of community development in that it integrates leadership formation into community change processes.



The intention of the program is to build leadership capacity to make positive change. The program does this by simultaneously teaching community residents the essential tasks and modes of leadership while focusing on and using “what works” in a community as a starting point for making desired changes and creating organizing innovations. A basic assumption of this program is that in every community and neighborhood there is something, no matter how small, that works and should be appreciated.

Roots of the program

The *Communities That Work* program, is an adaptation and merging of an organizational change methodology called Appreciative Inquiry (AI), which was created by Suresh Srivastva and David Cooperrider and a group of their colleagues at Case Western Reserve University and Asset Based Community Development (ABCD) created by John P. Kretzmann and John L. McKnight from Northwestern University. The overarching goal of *Communities That Work* is to help communities make positive change by:

- developing the capacity to actively engaging in an ongoing inquiry into the most positive aspects of their community,
- using the most positive aspects of their community to create an imaginative, innovative and vibrant shared vision,
- using their strengths & resources to implement their shared vision,



- using appreciative forms of evaluation to create and maintain commitment.

Basic premises of the program

The following are the fundamental principles of the program:

- A community is a living open-ended, indeterminate system capable of becoming more than it is at any given moment, and learning how to actively take part in guiding its own evolution.
- The solutions to problems are not found in the problems.
- The desired future of a community must be actively created. It does not automatically unfold as problems are fixed.
- The power of communities resides in relationships and connections within the community.
- The only sustainable development is development created and implemented by local residents in their own communities.
- Identifying and understanding those things in the community that work should start all interventions, whether major community renewal or minor neighborhood change.

If you are interested in knowing more about the program contact Chester J. Bowling, Assistant Professor and Extension Specialist in Community Leadership and Management, OSU Extension.

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